

The Last Chapter in the Book of Chronicles (2 Chronicles 36): A Literary Analysis

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Preface

The present study deals with the final chapter in the book of Chronicles (2 Chronicles 36).¹ Apart from the Declaration of Cyrus, this chapter is a kind of repetition of the concluding chapters of the book of Kings (2 Kgs 23:31–25:30). In these two books, which both resemble each other but also differ greatly, the final chapters deal with the events surrounding the last four kings of Judah and the Babylonian exile.² The nature and meaning of these chapters as the work's concluding chapters have been almost completely ignored in research, which has focused mainly on issues arising from the comparison between the endings of the books of Kings and Chronicles, respectively. For example, among the issues discussed in research we find:

¹ On the endings of biblical books, see Itzhak B. Gottlieb, “*Sof Davar: Biblical Endings*,” *Prooftexts* 11 (1991): 213–224. Gottlieb finds four models tending to recur at the end of biblical books. As for the endings of stories, they “are not as clear as the opening signs. Sometimes a section comes to an end without an explicit indication of an end.” See Frank Polak, *Biblical Narrative: Art and Design* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1994), 111 (Hebrew). I would like to thank Michael Avioz for commenting on an earlier draft of this paper.

² The connection between the two books, Kings and Chronicles, and in particular the question whether the Chronicler relies on the book of Kings or whether his book in fact reflects a parallel tradition, has yet to be solved decisively. See for example the three different approaches represented by Rainey, Talshir, and Auld, respectively: Anson F. Rainey, “The Chronicler and his Sources: Historical and Geographical,” in *The Chronicler as Historian*, ed. Michael P. Graham, Kenneth G. Höglund and Steven L. McKenzie, JSOTSup, 263 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 30–72; Zipora Talshir, “The Advantage of the Book of Kings over the Book of Chronicles,” in *OR LE-MAYER: Studies in Bible, Semitic Languages, Rabbinic Literature, and Ancient Civilizations*, ed. Shamir Yona (Beer Sheva: Beer Sheva Press, 2010), 159–182 (Hebrew); A. Graeme Auld, *Kings Without Privilege: David and Moses in the Story of Bible's Kings* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994). In the present study, I adopt the approach according to which the Chronicler, except for in a few anomalous cases, relies on a version of the book of Kings similar to the version known today.

- What caused the exile – does the punishment of exile in the book of Chronicles also relate to past sins like in the book of Kings, or is it only an immediate punishment for the sins of Zedekiah's own generation?³
- The going into exile – what was the extent of the exile as described by the Chronicler compared to its extent according to the Deuteronomist? Does he confine it to Jerusalem only, or does he imply a complete and comprehensive exile?⁴ Why does he mention the land's lying waste for seventy years?⁵
- The scope of the description – why is the description of the events surrounding the last four kings and the exile so concise in the book of Chronicles compared to the parallel description in the book of Kings?⁶

³ For the first view, see Baruch Halpern, "Why Manasseh is Blamed for the Babylonian Exile: The Evolution of a Biblical Tradition," *VT* 48 (1998): 473–514. The second view is attributed to Japhet, who reiterates it on several occasions, for example, Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 1069; eadem, "Theodicy in Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, ed. Annti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 426–469.

⁴ See for example: Thomas Willi, *Juda—Jehud—Israel: Studien zum Selbstverständnis des Judentums in Persischer Zeit*, FAT 12 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995), 22–23; Steven L. McKenzie, *1–2 Chronicles*, AOTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 371.

⁵ Mark Leuchter, "Jeremiah's 70-Year Prophecy and the *lb kmy/ssk Atbash* Codes," *Biblica* 85 (2004): 503–522. On the reception of this period in biblical and post-biblical literature, see recently Steven M. Bryan, "The End of Exile: The Reception of Jeremiah's Prediction of Seventy-Year Exile," *JBL* 138 (2018): 107–126. And see the discussion of Louis C. Jonker, "The Exile as Sabbath Rest: The Chronicler's Interpretation of the Exile," in *Exile and Suffering: A Selection of Papers Read at the 50th Anniversary Meeting of the Old Testament Society of South Africa OTWSA/OTSSA, Pretoria August 2007*, ed. Bob Becking & Dirk Human (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 213–228.

⁶ The Chronicler's description of these four kings amounts to only 23 verses compared to 57 verses in the book of Kings. This abbreviation greatly preoccupied the various scholars, and some were even greatly surprised by it. Rudolph sees this as a contradicting the general tendency of the Chronicler (Wilhelm Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, HAT [Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1955], 366). Japhet, for her part, sees it as a clear tendency of the Chronicler to shorten the description of destruction and exile because in his eyes the importance of destruction is greatly decreased (Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought* [Winona Lake: Eisenbraun, 2009], 284). Other scholars view the abbreviation as an attempt to conceal the last four kings of Judah, who in the eyes of the Chronicler do not deserve to be called kings of Israel. See Itzhak Amar, "Saul and Josiah's Deaths in Chronicles (1 Chr 10; 2 Chr 35:20–27)," *Beit Mikra* 62 (2017): 80–108 (Hebrew). However, as shown by Gilad, the Chronicler's description is not only an abbreviation, since in other aspects it also contains additions. See David Gilad, "The Last of the Kingdom of Judah according to the Book of Chronicles: A Methodological Investigation," in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis Presented to Moshe Garsiel*, ed. Shmuel Vargon, et al. (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2009), 251–266 (Hebrew).

The (almost automatic) comparison between these two end descriptions has caused the study of the concluding chapter of the book of Chronicles as an independent unit in its own right to be all but neglected.

Here, I analyze 2 Chr 36 on its own by means of close reading⁷ and attention to allusions from within the Book of Chronicles. I wish to show that the Chronicler shaped the concluding chapter to provide conclusive answers to questions that may have presented themselves to the reader's mind in the course of reading the book. For example, he undermines the institution of the monarchy to the point of its complete abolition. Following this, he also puts an end to the hope for the renewed rule of the Davidic dynasty in the post-exilic period. Instead of the Israelite kings, he positions foreign kings from various empires, such as Egypt, Babylon, and Persia, as alternative regimes. In the face of the abolition of the monarchy and the discontinuation of the dynasty, he positions the Temple as the exclusive entity with the power to unite the people and establish a society observing and preserving God's commandments. To achieve all this, the Chronicler acted as the master of the sources at his disposal. Sometimes, this control led him to reverse trends and perceptions on which he already had clarified his position throughout the book, such as the sympathetic attitude toward the monarchy and especially the hope for the renewed reign of the Davidic dynasty in the post-exilic period. He chose to do so precisely in the concluding chapter because this will leave a greater and longer lasting impression on the readers. This is the impression that will accompany them when they will seek to evaluate the history of the First Temple times in retrospect.

The concluding chapter contains within it at least five smaller units. These apparently separate units actually join together to form a coherent

⁷ This is how Simon defines its purposes: 'Close reading asks the following question of all the elements of the text and of the entire literary unit: What does the text say? How does it express this? What is it trying to convey? It answers these questions through philological, stylistic, and rhetorical investigations.' See Uriel Simon, *Reading Prophetic Narratives: Biblical Literature*, trans. Lenn J. Schramm (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997), xv.

text whose details serve the overall tendency.⁸ Thus, the great advantage of analyzing the concluding chapter through close reading and attention to allusions consists in exposing the small details on the one hand, and in constructing the overall trend on the other. It should be noted that this dual process cannot be carried out simultaneously, but should, instead, be viewed as a kind of jigsaw puzzle. We cannot properly assess the overall arrangement of the chapter and the aims that guided the Chronicler in carrying it out without examining all the details that make it up and their integration into the unfolding of the story.

The Structure of Chapter 36 and a Few General Points

The division of the chapter seems clear, as it emerges from a patterned overview repeated in connection with all four kings appearing in the story. The story closes with a scene dealing with the declaration of Cyrus. Therefore, the story should be divided into five parts: (1) 1–4 (Jehoahaz); (2) 5–8 (Jehoiakim); (3) 9–10 (Jehoiachin); (4) 11–21 (Zedekiah); (5) 22–23 (Declaration of Cyrus). Already in this initial division, one finding stands out: the relative length of the description of the Zedekiah's reign compared to the extreme conciseness of the description of Jehoiachin's reign.

The coverage of each king opens with the fixed and well-known Deuteronomistic formula that includes the age of the king at the time of his enthronement and the number of months he reigned in Jerusalem. The author adds a negative assessment to three of the kings: “And he did what was evil in the sight of God.” Only with regard to Jehoahaz no such negative assessment is found.⁹

An examination of the reigns of these four kings reveals that Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin are both described as having reigned for a total of three months, while Jehoiakim and Zedekiah are each described as having reigned

⁸ Yaira Amit, *The Book of the Judges: The Art of Editing* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 16.

⁹ Japhet attributes this to the mistake of the author (Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1063). In the LXX such an assessment is indeed found.

for a longer period of 11 years.¹⁰ Thus, these four kings are in fact divided into two groups: Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin on the one hand, and Jehoiakim and Zedekiah on the other. The members of these two groups appear alternately: three months – eleven years – three months – eleven years.

Three of the kings are said to have ascended to the throne following the intervention of an outside factor. Jehoahaz ascended to the throne thanks to the ‘people of the land’; Jehoiakim ascended to the throne thanks to Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt; and Zedekiah ascended to the throne following the intervention of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. Only Jehoiachin succeeded his father Jehoiakim naturally. Out of the four kings, only in the unit on Jehoiakim do we find the Deuteronomistic closing formula ‘and the rest of the acts of X are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah, and Y reigned in his place’.¹¹

Another conspicuous fact is that no less than three foreign kings are mentioned in the concluding chapter. The first is Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt, who appears in connection with Jehoahaz. After him, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is mentioned in connection with the other three king. The third king is Cyrus king of Persia, who is mentioned in the chapter's closing scene.

The prophet Jeremiah appears in the chapter in two different contexts: as the one to whom Zedekiah did not surrender, and as the herald of a prophecy indicating the duration of the exile (70 years) and its characteristics (“until the land has enjoyed its sabbaths”).

¹⁰ Although the reign of Jehoiachin is stated to endure for “three months and ten days,” it seems that a mistake was made here and that the time mark “ten” should refer to the age of Jehoiachin and not to the duration of his reign: “Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king” (as stated in the *Vorlage*), and not as written here: “Jehoiachin was eight years old when he became king.”

¹¹ The formula “and the rest of the acts of” does not appear in connection with all the kings of Judah. In connection with Solomon it appears in the variation *ושאר דברי שלמה* “and the remaining acts of Solomon.” In connection with Rehoboam the opening word *ויתר* “and the rest” is missing, and the formula begins with the words *ודברי רחבעם* “and the acts of Rehoboam.” Its full form is found in connection with Abijah, Jehoshaphat, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Manasseh (David Glatt-Gilad, “Regnal Formulae as a Historiographic Device in the Book of Chronicles,” *RB* 108 [2001]: 184–209).

There is a reference to the temple in all parts of the chapter except for in the unit on Jehoahaz. The temple has several names: the house of the Lord (18, 19), the house of God (7, 10, 14, 18), His abode (15), house, the temple (17). Alongside the references to the temple, there is an equally broad frame of references to the vessels of the temple. With the exception of Jehoahaz, such a reference occurs in connection with all the kings, under different names: the vessels of the house of the Lord, the precious vessels of the house of the Lord, the vessels of the house of God.

Of course, the above collection of details provides only a partial picture of the story, wherefore it now becomes necessary to analyze it in greater depth. The discussion below follows the division of the four kings into two groups: Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin on the one hand, and Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, on the other. The discussion will end with the declaration of Cyrus, its literary context, and its implications as the concluding scene of the entire book.

Jehoahaz (1–4) and Jehoiachin (9–10)

Jehoahaz does not ascend to the throne on his own or by his father's appointment, but with the help of the 'people of the land.'¹² This is a well-known procedure in times of crisis, which was also used by his father Josiah, who was appointed king after the 'people of the land' defeated the conspirators against his father Amon (2 Chr 33:25):

Then **the people of the land** killed all who had plotted against
King Amon
And **the people of the land** made Josiah his son king in his
place

¹² The scholarly discussion around the identity of 'the people of the land' has yet to be solved decisively. See for example, John T. Thames, "A New Discussion of the Meaning of the Phrase *am ha'ares* in the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 130 (2011): 109–125.

In the unit on Josiah, the role of the people of the land in crowning the king is emphasized, and the author repeats this role in a two-stage formula in which the phrase “people of the land” is repeated at each stage following a verb in the VaYiQTōL pattern. We also find a two-stage formula in connection with Jehoahaz, but it is shorter and the phrase “the people of the land” is omitted from the second clause:

Then **the people of the land** took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah
 And **they** made him king in his father’s place in
 Jerusalem¹³

Jehoahaz's crowning by the people of the land was cancelled by the king of Egypt after only three months. The description of his dethronement is syntactically difficult: ויסירהו מלך מצרים בירושלים: “and the king of Egypt removed him in Jerusalem” (3). In the book of Kings, the syntax is no less difficult: ויאסרהו ... במלך בירושלים: “and he imprisoned him ... in reigning in Jerusalem” (2 Kgs 23:33). In 1 Esdras (1:33), as also suggested by various scholars, it has been translated to ויסירהו מלך מצרים ממלך בירושלים: “and the king of Egypt removed him from reigning in Jerusalem.”¹⁴ Syntactically, the correction goes well, except for the fact that it complicates the text and may not reflect the intention of the Chronicler. A similar formulation was known to him from the *Vorlage*, but he chose to ignore it twice: when he substituted ויאסרהו “and he imprisoned him” for ויסירהו “and he removed him,” and when he omitted the word במלך “in reigning.”

It seems to me that the Chronicler's version should be left intact. The version in 1 Esdras may reflect a deliberate correction and not a scribal error or omission, as the new version constitutes a counter-reaction to the

¹³ In my opinion, Klein's correction in accordance with what is written in the *Vorlage* is not required at all. See Ralph W. Klein, *2 Chronicles: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 530, and compare the opposing view of Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1059.

¹⁴ Japhet and additional scholars accept the correction (Japhet, *ibid.*, 1063; Klein, *ibid.*, 531).

crowning of Jehoahaz in Jerusalem and his reign there in a way that creates an antithetical symmetry between his crowning at the hands of the people of the land and his overthrow at the hand of the king of Egypt:

And they made him king in his father's place	in Jerusalem
Reigned	in Jerusalem
And the king of Egypt dethroned him	in Jerusalem

According to this reading, Jerusalem is emphasized as the place where both the crowning, the reign, and the dethronement took place. Assuming that the dethronement was carried out through Pharaoh's emissaries, the verse contains no difficulty but reflects the simple fact that the dethronement of Jehoahaz took place specifically in Jerusalem.

The rest of the verses are written alternately: first the king of Egypt is mentioned together with an action he took, and then only the action taken by him is mentioned, and so forth:

וַיִּסְרֶהוּ מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם בִּירוּשָׁלַם
 וַיַּעֲנֹשׂ אֶת הָאָרֶץ מֵאָה כֶּבֶד-כֶּסֶף וְכֶבֶד זָהָב
 וַיִּמְלֹךְ מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם אֶת אֱלִיאִקִים אָחִיו עַל יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם
 וַיִּסַּב אֶת שְׁמוֹ יְהוֹיאִקִים
 וְאֵת יוֹאָחָז אָחִיו לְקַח נָכוֹ
 וַיְבִיֵאֵהוּ מִצְרָיִמָה

Then **the king of Egypt** deposed him in Jerusalem
 And imposed on the land a fine of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold
 And **the king of Egypt** made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem
 And changed his name to Jehoiakim.
 But **Necho** took
 And brought him to Egypt.

Through this latticed structure, the Chronicler sought to emphasize the absolute involvement of the king of Egypt in all the events without having to mention him in connection with every single action taken by him. The king of Egypt is undoubtedly the main character of the story. He determines the course of events and decides on all matters. All this stands in stark contrast to the opening, where the people of the land are depicted as the ones who appoint the king. Against the “taking” of Jehoahaz by the people of the land, Scripture emphasizes the ‘taking’ of Jehoahaz by the king of Egypt and his deportation to Egypt. Jehoahaz is a marginal character in the story: he is crowned against his will, and he is dethroned against his will.

The renaming of Jehoiakim by the king of Egypt seems to constitute a significant event, as it is placed in the center of the unit's closing scene as evidenced by the following chiasmic structure:

A וַיִּמְלֹךְ מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם

B אֶת אֶלְיָקִים אָחִיו עַל יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם

C וַיִּסַּב אֶת שְׁמוֹ יְהוֹיָקִים

B' וְאֶת יוֹאָחָז אָחִיו

A' לְקַח נָכוֹ וַיְבִיאָהוּ מִצְרַיִמָה

A And **the king of Egypt** crowned

B **His brother** Eliakim over Judah and Jerusalem

C And changed his name to Jehoiakim

B' And **his brother** Jehoahaz

A' **Necho** took and brought him to Egypt.

The structure opens and closes with the deeds of Necho king of Egypt: it opens with the crowning of Eliakim over Judah and Jerusalem and closes with the expulsion of Jehoahaz to Egypt. The appellation “his brother” appears twice, both in relation to Jehoahaz and in relation to Jehoiakim.

These two appellations are missing in the *Vorlage* where Jehoiakim appears as the son of Josiah and not as the brother of Jehoahaz (2 Kgs 23:34). It seems that here the Chronicler sought to avoid any possible mention of Josiah the righteous father in order to tell the stories of Jehoahaz only in relation to his brother Jehoiakim, and *vice versa*. In the center of the structure is found the clause dealing with his name change from Eliakim to Jehoiakim. The word **ויסב** 'changed' reminds the reader of the only additional occurrence of this word in the book, which also appears in the context of the replacement of the ruler: **“and he turned** the kingdom over to David son of Jesse” (1 Chr 10:14). It is possible that through this note, which has no echo in the *Vorlage*, the Chronicler creates a link between the reason for Saul's removal, which is stated explicitly: “... because he was unfaithful to the Lord ... and did not inquire of the Lord” (1 Chr 10:13–14), and the reason for the removal of Jehoahaz, about which we know nothing.

We now turn to Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin receives the shortest description among the last four kings of Judah. His short reign – three months in all – lasted as long as that of his brother Jehoahaz. The resemblances between these two kings are not limited to the duration of their reign. Another resemblance is the bringing of Jehoiachin to Babylon and the crowning of Zedekiah his brother in his stead. The matter is described in the same way in connection with these two kings, but the order of the clauses has been inverted:

Jehoiachin

וְלִתְשׁוּבַת הַשָּׁנָה שָׁלַח הַמֶּלֶךְ

נְבוּכַדְנֶאֶצַּר וַיְבִיאֵהוּ בְבֵלְאָה עִם כָּלִי

חֲמֻדַּת בַּיִת יְהוָה

וַיִּמְלֹךְ אֶת צְדָקְיָהוּ אָחִיו עַל יְהוּדָה

וּירוּשָׁלַם

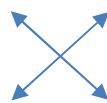
Jehoahaz

וַיִּמְלֹךְ מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם אֶת אֱלִיָּקִים

אָחִיו עַל יְהוּדָה וּירוּשָׁלַם

וַיִּסַּב אֶת שְׁמוֹ יְהוֹיָקִים וְאֶת יוֹאָחָז

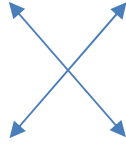
אָחִיו לְקַח נְכוּ וַיְבִיאֵהוּ מִצְרַיִמָּה



Jehoahaz

And the king of Egypt crowned His brother Eliakim over Judah and Jerusalem

And changed his name to Jehoiakim, and his brother Jehoahaz Necho took **and brought him to Egypt.**



Jehoiachin

... king Nebuchadnezzar **and brought him to Babylon,** with the precious vessels of the house of the Lord **and made his brother Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem.**

In the unit on Jehoahaz, the author prefaces the crowning of his brother Eliakim to the deportation of Jehoahaz to Egypt. In the unit on Jehoiachin, the events are described in the reverse order: first the deportation to Babylon and only afterwards the crowning of his brother Zedekiah. It is possible that the reversal stems from a fundamental difference with regard to Jehoiachin: he was not deported to Babylon alone, since the vessels of the temple were deported with him. This event was much more important than the deportation of Jehoahaz, who was deported to Egypt by himself.

Apart from the resemblances between these two kings, the story about Jehoiachin differs from the story about Jehoahaz in two details: the negative assessment “and he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” and the clause “and at the turn of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent.” The negative assessment of Jehoiachin comes without reference to a specific action that might justify it. The immediate connection to the punishment is in the best tradition of the Chronicler, who usually creates this kind of connection between sin and punishment, in this case a personal punishment. The phrase *ולתשובת השנה* “and at the turn of the year” is a variation on the phrase found in the book of Kings *בעת ההיא* “at that time” (2 Kgs 24:10). Exegetes and scholars have suggested various explanations of the phrase as

well as of the Chronicler's reason for making this change.¹⁵ The phrase itself (with slight modifications) appears in two places in the Hebrew Bible: first, in the war of David and Joab against the Ammonites (2 Sam 11:1), and second, in the war between Aram and Israel (1 Kgs 20:22, 26). Both appearances are found in the context of a war, and the phrase seems to be connected to that time of the year when the weather allows for more comfortable fighting conditions or plenty of food for the animals, most likely in the fall or in the spring.¹⁶ Apart from this plausible interpretation, it is also possible that the phrase should be seen as a literary echo of the sin of David with Bathsheba, which also opens with the words “ויהי לתשובת השנה” “and it came to happen at the turn of the year” (2 Sam 11:1). Hence, this change does not necessarily indicate that the Chronicler knew a different version of the *Vorlage*. It may also reflect a deliberate attempt on his part to link the sins of Jehoiachin to the sin of David with Bathsheba and in this way to indirectly justify his punishment.

Jehoiakim (5–8) and Zedekiah (11–21)

The description of Jehoiakim's reign contains three components: an opening formula that, in this case, also includes a negative assessment: “And he did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord;” the main body of the story dealing with the dethronement of the king; and a typical Deuteronomistic closing formula: “Now the rest of the acts of X are written in the book of the Kings of Israel and Judah And Y reigned in his place.” The main body of the story, which deals with the rise of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon against Jehoiakim, also describes a punishment for sins of an unknown nature.¹⁷ The

¹⁵ See Michael Avioz, “‘The Spring of the Year’ (2 Chronicles 36:10) and the Chronicler's Sources,” *JHS* (2012):1–9 and his references to additional studies. Avioz conjectures that the correction has its origin in a source unknown to the Deuteronomist.

¹⁶ See the different opinions mentioned in Avioz, *ibid.*, 6–7. See also 2 Chr 24:23 for a slightly different formulation: “ויהי לתקופת השנה” “it happened at the turn of the year.”

¹⁷ The replacement of the Egyptian Empire for the Babylonian Empire is especially pronounced in the unit on Jehoiakim. No less than four times is Babylon mentioned in these four verses (King of Babylon, Babylon, to Babylon, in Babylon).

continuation, *וַיֹּאסְרֵהוּ בַּנְּחֹשְׁתַיִם לְהַלִּיכּוֹ בַּבֵּלָה* “and he bound him in chains to take him to Babylon,” is an exact repetition of words already written about his great-grandfather Manasseh: “Therefore the Lord brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks and bound him with chains of bronze and brought him to Babylon *וַיֹּאסְרֵהוּ בַּנְּחֹשְׁתַיִם* וי (2 Chr 33:11). The resemblance to Manasseh, of which there is no hint in the *Vorlage*, recalls Manasseh's sins and may explain the simple statement: “And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.”

The Chronicler binds these two kings together, and not without a purpose. In the eyes of the Deuteronomist, Manasseh is the king who bears responsibility for the destruction of the temple, and according to the Chronicler something of his sins also attached to Jehoiakim. One should note the verbal similarity between the description of Jehoahaz's dethronement *וַיִּסְרֶהוּ* and the description of the capture of Jehoiakim *וַיֹּאסְרֵהוּ*, which here establishes a kind of gradation in the severity of the punishment from the mild to the severe: Jehoahaz is dethroned and taken to a foreign land while Jehoiakim is dethroned, bound in chains of bronze, and taken to a foreign land.¹⁸

The personal punishment imposed on Jehoiakim is accompanied by another punishment in the form of the taking the temple vessels to Babylon and their presentation in the king's palace. A close reading of the verses reveals that Nebuchadnezzar took some “of the vessels of the temple” and not all the vessels of the temple. This fact is confirmed by the book of Daniel, which stresses the partiality of the plunder of the vessels: “And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god” (Dan 1:2).

¹⁸ Some hold that the word *לְהַלִּיכּוֹ* “to bring him” expresses a future intention that has not necessarily been realized, in contrast to the *VaYiQTOL* form *וַיֹּלִיכֵהוּ* “and he brought him” appearing in connection with Manasseh (2 Chr 33:11).

The closing formula of the unit on Jehoiakim includes two additional components: ותעבבותיו "and his abominations," והנמצא עליו "and that which was found upon him." As for the first component, it stands out especially against the background of the similar but positive addition at the end of the units on Hezekiah: "Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and his good deeds" (2 Chr 32:32); and Josiah: "Now the rest of the acts of Josiah and his good deeds" (2 Chr 35:26). Likewise, the aforementioned connection to the sins of Manasseh is also confirmed here through the reference to the abominations of Jehoiakim, which resonate the abominations of Manasseh (2 Chr 33:2). The second component – "and that which was found upon him" – is unprecedented and not entirely clear. It is possible that the two components should be read together: "And his abominations that were found against him," in the sense of "the rest of the crimes that were found in him." It should be noted that the word עליו "upon him" reappears elsewhere in the story: עליו בבל עלה נבוכדנאצר מלך בבל "against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon." In this way, the Chronicler links Jehoiakim's "abominations" and "that which was found upon him" to his punishment – "against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon."

The unit dealing with Zedekiah is the largest among the five units comprising the story. It contains three components: the sin (12–14), the warning (15–16), and the punishment (17–20). The direct description of Zedekiah's sins amounts to a verse and a half, but unlike the other three kings in the story, here the Chronicler takes pains to clarify the nature of the sin and does not rest content with the negative assessment that "he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord." According to the text, Zedekiah sinned against three different entities: the prophet Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar, and God. The Chronicler describes the sins of Zedekiah toward each of these three entities with a different verb. At the end of each sin the Chronicler mentions the name of God:

מפי יהוה	מלפני ירמיהו הנביא	לא נכנע
אשר השביעו באלהים	במלך נבוכדנאצר	מרד
אלהי ישראל	אל יהוה	ויקש את ערפו ויאמץ את לבבו משוב
He did not humble himself	before <i>Jeremiah</i> the prophet	who spoke from the mouth of <u>the Lord</u>
He rebelled against	King <i>Nebuchadnezzar</i>	who had made him swear by <u>God</u>
He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning	to the <i>Lord</i>	<u>the God</u> of Israel

The use of these verbs is in fact a reflection, or perhaps a recurrence, of a situation that we have already encountered earlier in the book. Zedekiah's lack of subservience (לא נכנע) to the prophet Jeremiah is directly opposed to the behavior of the people after the invasion of king Shishak of Egypt: "The princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves (ויכנעו)" (2 Chr 12:6); of the behavior of Hezekiah following his illness: "And Hezekiah humbled himself (ויכנע) for the pride of his heart" (32:26); and of the behavior of Manasseh after having gone into exile: "And he humbled himself exceedingly (ויכנע מאד) before the God of his fathers" (33:12). In all three cases, the surrender is to God, and it is this surrender that enables His mercy. Zedekiah does not surrender to Jeremiah, the messenger of God. Surrender is an initial but necessary step since it is, by nature, a passive action that does not require special effort.

Not only does Zedekiah not surrender, but he also acts in exactly the opposite way. He works actively against Nebuchadnezzar, the messenger of God, thus actually hastening the inevitable destruction. The use of the verb מרד resonates with its additional appearance in the book, when Abijah

describes Jeroboam's actions against Solomon: “And he rebelled (וימרד) against his master” (2 Chr 13). Jeroboam's rebellion led to division, while Zedekiah's rebellion led to exile. Some of the last three verbs – “stiffened,” “hardened,” “against turning” – reappear in the speech of Hezekiah's emissaries before the rest of the kingdom of Israel (2 Chr 30:6–9). In this speech, which is a kind of repetition of Hezekiah's speech to the people (29:5–10), the emissaries of Hezekiah encourage the rest of the kingdom of Israel to return to God and to the legitimate worship in Jerusalem (the root שׁוׁב “to return” appears five times).¹⁹ The emissaries warn against stiffening the neck: “Now do not stiffen your neck like your fathers” (30:8). The stiffening of the neck and the unwillingness to return to God are the factors that caused the destruction of Israel and prevented God's mercy, making it impossible to calm down his wrath (8). Zedekiah sins in all these regards: he stiffens his neck, hardens his heart, and does not return to God. Hence, the destruction becomes inevitable.

From the sins of Zedekiah the Chronicler goes on to discuss the sins of “the leaders of the priests and the people”.²⁰ Although the description of the sins of the people is shorter than the description of the sins of Zedekiah, it seems to contain harsher words:

They increased **unfaithfulness** (למעל מעל) following all the abominations of the nations
And they defiled (ויטמאו) the house of the Lord that he had made holy in Jerusalem

The use of the roots מע״ל “to be unfaithful” and טמ״א “to defile” alongside the mention of the abominations of the gentiles and the temple is a step up

¹⁹ See Itzhak Amar, “The Characterization of Rehoboam and Jeroboam as a Reflection of the Chronicler's View of the Schism,” *JHS* 17 (2017): 25–27.

²⁰ Scholars tend to correct here to שרי יהודה הכהנים והעם 'the princes of Judah and the priests and the people'. See for example: Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 533.

compared to the description of Zedekiah. The root מע"ל is one of the most prominent hallmarks of the Chronicler and is widely used in the book to describe grave sins that carry immediate punishment. The Chronicler emphasizes the sin by combining the word הרבו "they increased" and the doubling of the root מע"ל, a doubling echoed only in connection with Ahaz, the most wicked king in the entire book (2 Chr 28:19).²¹

It is significant that the sin ויטמאו את בית יהוה "they defiled the house of the Lord" is the last sin recorded in the book. The decision to close the book with a sin related to the temple is no surprise, in light of the extensive place and great importance the Chronicler assigns to the temple in his book.²² The importance of the temple is reflected in the gravity of the sin, in this case the defilement of the temple, a sin from which there is no way back. Moreover, the root טמ"א is extremely rare in the book of Chronicles, and its few appearances are all connected to the temple.²³ The choice of exactly this root and the Chronicler's rare use of it may indicate both the severity of the act and the Chronicler's desire to color the last sin in the book in a manner that would justify the most severe punishment of all. Overall, then, the

²¹ On Ahaz in the book of Chronicles, see Itzhak Amar, "Chaotic Writing as a Literary Element in the Story of Ahaz in 2 Chronicles 28," *VT* 66 (2016): 349–364, and the studies mentioned there.

²² See, for example: Hugh G. Williamson, "The Temple in the Books of Chronicles," in *Templum Amicitiae: Essays on the Second Temple Presented to Ernst Bammel*, ed. William Horbury, JSOTSup 48 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 15–31; Gary N. Knoppers, "'The City Yhwh has Chosen': The Chronicler's Promotion of Jerusalem in the Light of Recent Archaeology," in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, ed. Ann Killebrew and Andrew Vaughn, SBL SymS 18 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 307–326; Steven J. Schweitzer, "The Temple in Samuel-Kings and Chronicles," in *Rewriting Biblical History: Essays on Chronicles and Ben Sira in Honor of Pancratius C. Beentjes*, ed. Jeremy Corley and Harm van Grol (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 123–138.

²³ The use of the root טמ"א appears in 2 Chr 26:19 in a verse dealing with the positioning of guards at the gates of the temple lest an unclean person enter it. It appears a second time in the context of Hezekiah's reform (2 Chr 29:16), when Hezekiah removed the idols from the Temple. Japhet points out that the word ויטמאו here is too general, and various interpretations can be hung on it (Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1070). In light of the two additional sources, the word ויטמאו can be said to refer the entry of unclean people into the Temple or the bringing of idols into the Temple.

Chronicle's account of Zedekiah's reign draws a hierarchical system of sins, first in connection with Zedekiah and then in connection with the rest of the people: Did not surrender → Rebelled → Stiffened his neck and hardened his heart → Increased unfaithfulness → Defiled the house of the Lord.

From the description of the sins, the Chronicler goes on to deal with the warning that precedes the punishment. The issue of warning is a recurring motif in the book, especially warnings from the mouths of the prophets, although there is no complete consistency in this matter.²⁴ It seems that the Chronicler seeks to create a symmetry between the sin and the warning: “The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place.”²⁵ It is possible that the word “his messengers” refers both to the prophet Jeremiah and to king Nebuchadnezzar. Both serve, in one way or another, as God's messengers. Next comes the reason for sending the prophets to warn: “For he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.” “His people” is the people in verse 14: “All the leaders of the priests and the people,” and “his dwelling place” is, of course, the temple with respect to the sin “and they defiled the house of the Lord.”

The people's reference to the warning is described in three short stiches:

But they were:

mocking	the messengers of God
despising	his words
and scoffing	at his prophets

The separation between “the messengers of God” in the first stich and “his prophets” in the third stich shows that this is not a case of synonymous parallelism (as may be learned from the word “his messengers”), but two

²⁴ Japhet, *Ideology*, 138–149. And compare also to the criticism of Yaira Amit, “The Role of Prophecy and Prophets in the Chronicler's World,” in *Prophets, Prophecy and Prophetic Texts in Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Michael H. Floyd and Robert D. Haak (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 80–101.

²⁵ Compare “Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the Lord. These testified against them, but they would not pay attention” (2 Chr 24:19).

different entities, perhaps king Nebuchadnezzar and the prophet Jeremiah mentioned earlier.²⁶

The three verbs at the beginning of each stich form a kind of chiasmic structure at the center of which stands contempt for the words of God:

A ויהיו מלעבים במלאכי האלהים

B ובזים דבריו

A' ומתעתעים בנבאיו

A Mocking (the messengers of God)

B Despising (the words of God)

A' Scoffing (the messenger of God)

The opening and closing stiches express ridicule toward the messengers of God. The verb מלעבים is a *hapax legomenon* and constitutes a difficulty, and some have corrected it to מלעיגים in accordance with the additional appearance of this word in the book: “but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them” (2 Chr 30:10).²⁷ The verb מתעתעים is derived from the quadrilateral root תעת"ע and also appears once in the Torah: והייתי בעיניו כמתעתע “I shall seem to be mocking him” (Gen 27:12). It is worth noting the translation of *Onkelos* there: וְאִיְהִי בְעֵינֹהִי כְמַתְלַעֵב meaning I will be like a mocker and ridiculer in the eyes of my father. According to this, the form מלעבים is actually a synonym (in Aramaic) for the word מתעתעים, and the correction מלעיגים becomes unnecessary.²⁸ The verb בזים 'despising' that appears in the center of the structure is already a step up: not only are they mocking the messengers of God, but they are also despising the words of God himself.

²⁶ *Contra* Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1071.

²⁷ See for example, Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 533, 541 n. 46.

²⁸ Rudolph held that, indeed, the source of the word מלעבים is Aramaic (*Cronikbücher*, 336).

These three verbs strongly color the entire issue and create a unique, dramatic explanation of the reasoning brought at the end of the verse: עד “until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until there was no remedy.” The double use of the word עד “until,” contrary to the Chronicler's usual tendency to be concise and to omit doubled words, is intended to ensure the reading of the verse in two beats:

עד עלֹזֹת חֲמַת יְהוָה בְּעַמּוֹ
עד לְאִין מְרַפָּא

Until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people
Until there was no cure

Such a reading creates a delay at the beginning of the second stich, which builds up a tension and makes the reader ponder the question how serious God's anger is. The second stich immediately makes it clear that God's anger is comparable to an incurable disease. The use of the phrase לְאִין מְרַפָּא “incurable” is no coincidence, it is taken from the inevitable punishment of Jehoram, who was one of the most wicked kings among the kings of Judah:

וְאַחֲרַי כָּל זֹאת נִגְפוּ יְהוָה בְּמַעֲיוֹ לְחַלֵּי לְאִין מְרַפָּא

“and after all this the Lord struck him in his bowels with an incurable disease” (2 Chr 21:18).

The absolute anger from which there is no way back leads to punishment. The Chronicler connects the anger to the punishment through the root of על"ה “until the wrath of the Lord rose” vs. ויעל עליהם “and he rose up against them.”²⁹ The description of the punishment is written in four verses, the first three of them each having four clauses:

²⁹ The root על"ה appears four times in the chapter. Of these, the word ויעל is worthy of special mention since it closes the book.

v.20	v.19	v.18	v.17
<p>וַיַּגֵּל הַשְּׂאֲרִית מִן הַחֶרֶב אֶל בָּבֶל וַיְהִי לוֹ וּלְבָנָיו לְעֲבָדִים עַד מֶלֶךְ מַלְכוּת פָּרְס</p>	<p>1. וַיִּשְׂרְפוּ אֶת בַּיִת הָאֱלֹהִים 2. וַיִּנְתְּצוּ אֶת חֹמֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם 3. וְכָל אַרְמְנוֹתֶיהָ שָׂרְפוּ בְּאֵשׁ וְכָל כְּלֵי מַחְמַדֶּיהָ לְהַשְׁחִית</p>	<p>1. וְכָל כְּלֵי בַיִת הָאֱלֹהִים הַגְּדֹלִים וְהַקְּטָנִים 2. וְאַצְרוֹת בַּיִת יְהוָה 3. וְאַצְרוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ וְשָׂרָיו הַפֶּל הֵבִיא בָבֶל</p>	<p>1. וַיַּעַל עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת מֶלֶךְ כַּשְׂדִים 2. וַיַּהַרְגַם בַּחֹרֶיָהֶם בַּחֶרֶב בְּבַיִת מִקְדָּשָׁם 3. וְלֹא חָמַל עַל בָּחוּר וּבַתּוֹלָה זָקֵן וַיִּשֶׁשׁ הַפֶּל נָתַן בְּיָדוֹ</p>
v. 17	v. 18	v. 19	v. 20
<p>1. Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans 2. who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary 3. and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand.</p>	<p>1. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small 2. and the treasures of the house of the Lord 3. and the treasures of the king and of his princes. All these he brought to Babylon.</p>	<p>1. And they burned the house of God 2. and broke down the wall of Jerusalem 3. and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels.</p>	<p>1. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, 2. and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia.</p>

Each of the four verses of punishment has a clearly discernable theme: the first one deals with death, the second with looting, the third with destruction, and the fourth with exile. Did the Chronicler seek to create a gradual description of the punishment from the mild to the severe?³⁰ This possibility seems extremely far-fetched, since it assumes that the Chronicler viewed death as a lighter punishment than the looting of the temple and the king's treasures. A more plausible way of explaining this order is according to the sequence of the events: first the people were killed, then the treasures of the temple and the king were looted, then Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, and finally the people were exiled to Babylon.³¹

As mentioned, each of the first three verses is comprised of four clauses. The first three clauses refer to the punishment itself, while the last clause constitutes a kind of general summary that opens with the word כָּל “all.”³²

1. He brought up – killed – had no compassion → He gave them **all** into his hands.
2. And all the vessels of the house of God – and the treasures of the house of the Lord – and the treasures of the king → **All** these he brought to Babylon.
3. And they burned – and broke down – and burned → and destroyed **all** its precious vessels.³³

³⁰ On the perception of exile in the Bible compared to other punishments, see Bustenay Oded, *The Early History of the Babylonian Exile (8th –6th centuries B.C.E)* (Haifa: Pardes, 2010), 516–534 (Hebrew).

³¹ The stance that the order of events as presented by Scripture is historically accurate touches upon a fundamental question in biblical study concerning the relationship between literary writing and history. As Sarah Japhet puts it: "If the narrative is 'literature', that is, a product of individual or a collective creative endeavor, to what degree may it be employed for reconstructing the history of ancient Israel." See Sara Japhet, "'History' and 'Literature' in the Persian Period: The Restoration of the Temple," in *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies on the Restoration Period* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 153.

³² On this formula, see Yair Zakovitch, *The Pattern of the Numerical Sequence Three-Four in the Bible* (Ph.D diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977) (Hebrew).

³³ Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1074 views the ending “and destroyed all its precious vessels” as a reference to the vessels of the temple. In her opinion, such a reading creates a chiastic structure in this unit: temple – city – city – temple. In my opinion, this interpretation does not stand the test of Scripture. Please note: there is no reason for the Chronicler to deal with the destruction of the temple vessels after having already declared in the previous verse that

The first verse, written in a particularly literary and ornamental style, contains a description of the death of the people of Jerusalem inside the temple and probably also outside it.³⁴ This distinction, which seems unnecessary and has no echo in the *Vorlage*, creates a link to the first three verses of the punishment. In each, the temple appears: in the first verse – death in the temple; in the second verse – the looting of the temple vessels; and in the third verse – the destruction of the temple.

The Chronicler's unique and poetic description culminates in the description of the killing of the population: *ולא חמל על בחור ובתולה זקן ויששׁ*.
 “And had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged.” The first part of this clause contains a parallelism, “young man or virgin,” which makes us expect that it will continue in the second half as well: “old man and old woman” (זקן וזקנה) or like the version of 1 Esdras (1:50): “old man and suckling” (זקן ויונק).³⁵ However, the words “old man or aged” do not constitute such a parallelism. In any case, the current wording expresses comprehensiveness – the massacre carried out by Nebuchadnezzar did not skip over any of the populations in Jerusalem, as can also be learned from the verse's concluding remark: “He gave them all into his hands.” The cruelty of the king of Babylon as reflected in the phrase “and had no compassion” is of course mentioned as a counterweight to the mercy of God mentioned earlier: “For he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.”
 Unlike the first verse, in which each of the first three clauses contains an action related to the punishment, the second verse has verbs in the first three

the king of Babylon brought them all to Babylon. Hence, it seems to me that this is a concluding clause and not a clause standing on its own.

³⁴ The phrase *בית מקדשם* “their sanctuary,” is not to be found anywhere else in Chronicles (or in the Bible for that matter), and it becomes frequent in the rabbinic literature of Second Temple times onwards. This fact may indicate that this is a later gloss meant to reconcile the duplication in the verse regarding the killing of the young men. This creates a clear distinction between the young men who were killed inside the temple and the population who were killed outside it.

³⁵ This reading seems to have support also in Ps 148:18, although it must be noted that it ignores the female component (“and virgin”) in the verse's first stich.

clauses, but only in the fourth and last clause a practical indication of the punishment appears: “All these he brought to Babylon.” In this verse, the Chronicler chooses to commence with the greater disaster – the looting of the temple vessels – and to conclude with the smaller disaster – the looting of the king's treasures. In between, the treasures of the temple are mentioned, which probably refer to the money raised for the restoration of the building. At the end of the verse, as stated, comes a sentence summarizing what was done to all that was looted: “All these he brought to Babylon.”

The third verse returns to the format of the first one, and each one of its clauses mentions an act of destruction related to Jerusalem. Here, too, the Chronicler chooses to start with the most serious event – the burning of the temple, to continue with the demolition of the walls of Jerusalem, and to conclude with the burning of the city. Like in the two previous verses, the last clause sums up everything that was done in Jerusalem: “And destroyed all its precious vessels.”³⁶

An interesting phenomenon occurring in this unit is the plural form used by the Chronicler to describe the destruction of Jerusalem. In the three other verses, the killing, plundering, and exile are described in the singular referring directly to the king of Babylon: he rose, killed, had no compassion, brought, and exiled. In the third verse, the singular form is replaced by the plural form: they burned, demolished, and burned. It is possible that in doing so the Chronicler sought to differentiate this verse from the others and thus to emphasize its importance: the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem are the most significant events among all the events of the destruction, more significant than the massacre, the looting of vessels, and even than exile itself. Such an emphasis would fit the Chronicler's perception of the paramount importance of the temple and Jerusalem. Both the last sin and the most severe punishment in the book relate to the temple.

³⁶ The word “vessels” does not seem to belong here, and some scholars have omitted it claiming that its appearance is due to dittography resulting from the appearance of the word “vessel” in the previous verse.

The last act of punishment is exile. The Chronicler emphasizes the partiality of this punishment by employing the word “remnant,” thereby actually reinforcing the description of the killing in the first verse, meaning that such a great number of people died that only a few were left to be exiled. The fact that the king is not mentioned in connection with this deportation stands out. In fact, the king appears only once in all four verses of the punishment, while the Chronicler notes the looting of the treasures of the king and the princes. The Chronicler's silence on this matter is puzzling in light of his meticulous mention of the deportations to Egypt and Babylon of all three kings preceding Zedekiah. Precisely in connection with Zedekiah, the last and most wicked of the kings, no such explicit statement is found, at all. Some have conjectured that the Chronicler's words “and he exiled the remnant” are meant to include Zedekiah,³⁷ but this seems far-fetched, especially in light of his aforementioned tendency to focus the main part of the story on the expulsion of the king, so one is expected here, as well. The blaring silence about the fate of the king – not when he arrived in Babylon, as we have already become accustomed to the fact that the Chronicler remains silent about this, but about his fate in Jerusalem – needs to be explained. It seems to me that this silence reflects a perceptual makeover that must not be underestimated: it is highly possible that the Chronicler sought to emphasize that, at the moment of exile, and perhaps even earlier (probably in the late days of Josiah), the king's historical role came to an end.³⁸ From that point on, there was no more need for a king but for a leader with characteristics and powers different from those of the king. This is probably more than a hint to the present situation, in which the role of the king no longer exists within the

³⁷ Japhet, *Ideology*, 290 raises this as a possibility.

³⁸ The scholarly discussion on the attitude toward the Davidic dynasty encompasses entire studies that we will not be able to address in the present framework. See a brief summary of opinions in Hugh G. Williamson, “Eschatology in Chronicles,” *TynBul* 28 (1977): 115–145. Our conclusion contradicts some very recent studies on this subject. See Sunwoo Hwang, *The Hope for the Restoration of the Davidic Kingdom in the Light of the Davidic Covenant in Chronicles* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2014). For an opposing opinion, see Steven J. Schweitzer, *Reading Utopia in Chronicles*, OTS 442 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 18.

framework of the Jewish leadership of the state of Yehud, and the possibility of maintaining a normal life routine without the king is evident.³⁹

The four verses describing the punishment form a chiastic structure:

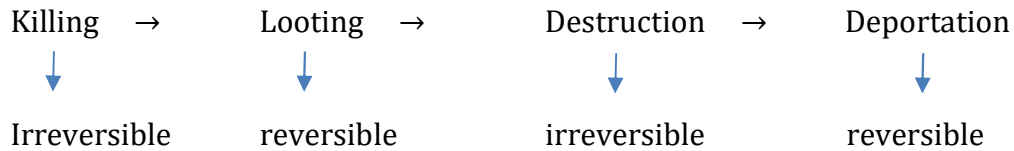
- A Therefore he brought up against **them the king of the Chaldeans**
 B Who killed their young men with **the sword** in the house of their sanctuary
- He gave them **all** into his hand
- C **All** these he brought to Babylon
 And destroyed **all** its precious vessels
- B' He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from **the sword**
- A' And they became servants to him and to his sons until **the establishment of the kingdom of Persia.**

The unit of the punishment begins with the ascent of a Babylonian king to Jerusalem and closes with the ascent of a Persian king to the throne. The first act of punishment is death by the sword, and the last act of punishment is the deportation of all those who survived that sword. In between, there are three units each dealing with a different punishment and each closing with a summary that commences with the word “all.”

The four units of the punishment reveal an even deeper structure. While the first and third units deal with total destruction and punitive actions from which there is no return, the second and fourth units deal with punishment from which there is a way back. The king of Babylon brings the vessels and the treasures to Babylon, and with them he also deports the

³⁹This perception is already anticipated in the story about the return of the Judahite prisoners in 2 Chronicles 28, see Ehud Ben-Zvi, “A Gateway to the Chronicler's Teaching: The Account of the Reign of Ahaz in 2 Chr 28,1–27,” in *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles* (London: Equinox, 2006), 224–225.

people. In both cases, there is more than a hint to the hope that the vessels and the exiles will eventually return to Jerusalem.⁴⁰ In this way a balanced and latticed text is obtained between irreversible punishments and reversible punishments:



Having completed the description of the punishment, the Chronicler explains why the rise of the Persian empire constitutes the end of the exile: “To fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.”⁴¹ The mention of Jeremiah's prophecy creates an *inclusio* with the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah who did not surrender to Jeremiah:

לא נִכְנַע מִלְפָּנַי יְרֵמְיָהוּ הַנְּבִיא מִפִּי יְהוָה
 לְמַלְאוֹת דְּבַר יְהוָה בְּפִי יְרֵמְיָהוּ

He did not humble himself before **Jeremiah**... who spoke **from the mouth** of the Lord

To fulfill the word of the Lord by **the mouth of Jeremiah**

Zedekiah's disregard for Jeremiah's words from the mouth of God was the first stumbling block in the deterioration that eventually led to destruction and exile. Ironically, the end of the exile now depends on the mouth of Jeremiah himself and on his prophecy. The words of Jeremiah, which did not receive the attention they deserved in the days of Zedekiah, now receive

⁴⁰ Concerning the vessels, see Gary N. Knoppers, “Treasures Won and Lost: Royal (Mis)appropriations in Kings and Chronicles,” in *The Chronicler as Author*, ed. Michael P. Graham and Steven L. McKenzie, JSOTSup 263 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 206–207.

⁴¹ According to Kartviet, the verse is a late gloss. See Magnar Kartviet, “2 Chronicles 36.20–23 as Literary and Theological Interface,” in *The Chronicler as Author*, ed. Michael P. Graham & Steven L. McKenzie, JSOTSup 263 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 398–399.

their proper attention, and they actually determine the expiration date of the exile.

The verse itself forms a chiasmic structure:

A למלאות דבר-יהנה בפיו ירמיהו

B עד-רצתה הארץ את-שבתותיה

B' כל-ימי השמה שבתה

A' למלאות שבועים שנה

A **To fulfill** the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah

B Until the land had enjoyed **its Sabbaths**

B' All the days that it lay desolate **it kept Sabbath**

A' **To fulfill** seventy years

This structure makes it easy to identify the artificial connection that the Chronicler makes between the words of Jeremiah (Jer 25:1; 29:10), which refer only to the fulfillment of the seventieth year, and the rebuke in the book of Leviticus (26:33–34), which refers only to the sabbaths during which the land remains desolate.⁴²

The period of the exile is thus limited in time: “Until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths.” The use of the word עד “until” as a delimitation of time reappears at the end of the punishment section: “Until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia.” In this way, a connection is created between the desolation of the land and the rise of the Persian empire. These two components become interdependent, as if Scripture comes to say that the rise of the Persian empire will take place when the land ceases to lie desolate, but not one single moment before that. Finally, one may claim that in the face of the land that lies desolate and begins to empty out, the only thing that has a real chance of being fulfilled is the word of God to Jeremiah.⁴³

⁴² See Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1075–1076.

⁴³ See Gilead, “The Last Years,” 263 quoting Tovah Forti.

The Decree of Cyrus

The decree of Cyrus ends the book and serves as a contrast to the entire chapter. Against the various empires' abuse of the kings of Judah and their turning them into puppets on a string, and against the destruction and exile, Cyrus now allows the exiles to return and to build the temple in Jerusalem. Cyrus is thus presented as the harbinger of redemption and as one who operates in the name of God in order to restore the situation to its former state.

Admittedly, a further examination of this closing scene shows that reality has not necessarily changed. The ruling empire still determines the fate of the people whether they are in Jerusalem or in Babylon. Moreover, the ruling power still serves as God's messenger, hence there is no great difference between king Necho of Egypt speaking in the name of God and Cyrus speaking in the name of the God of heaven.⁴⁴ And yet, one major difference exists: no Israelite king is mentioned, and there is probably not even need for any Israelite king. Moreover, the place of the Israelite king is now taken by the foreign king who from now on takes on two crowns. The absence of an Israelite king from the closing scene of the book and his replacement by a Persian king thus continues the trend that began with the disappearance of Zedekiah and the archiving of the Israelite monarchy project.⁴⁵

If we employ a concept coined by Menachem Perry with regard to general literature and applied by Yaira Amit to biblical literature, then the concluding chapter of the book of Chronicles, and especially its concluding scene, may be defined as a "reversal ending." This term refers to the ending of a story, a section of stories, or even an entire book reflecting perceptions

⁴⁴ See Steven J. Schweitzer, "Exile, Empire and Prophecy Reframing Utopian Concerns in Chronicles," in *Worlds That Could Not Be: Utopia in Chronicles, Ezra Nehemiah*, ed. Steven J. Schweitzer and Frauke Uhlenbruch (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 88–89, 92–94. See also Paul S. Evans, "The Function of the Chronicler's Temple Despoliation Notices in Light of Imperial Realities in Yehud," *JBL* 129 (2010): 42–45.

⁴⁵ See William Riley, *King and Cultus in Chronicles: Worship and the Reinterpretation of History*, JSOTSup 160 (Sheffield Academia Press, Sheffield 1993), 140–156.

that seem to contradict perceptions hitherto presented by the author. As Amit puts it, “there are texts in the Bible in which the end has been given an extremely significant role – to illuminate the entire work in an additional or different light.”⁴⁶ The implications of this for our study are as follows: if until this point the Chronicler had created the impression that he attaches special importance to the rule of a king from the House of David, from now on the positive attitude towards this dynasty no longer entails the possibility that one of its members will become king again. A leader from the House of David is a possibility; a king from the House of David is inconceivable.⁴⁷

In light of this, the final words of Cyrus, “whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him,” may be seen as a change of tendency and as representing an alternative to the view reflected in the words of David to his son Solomon: “Now, my son, the Lord be with you, so that you may succeed in building the house of the Lord your God” (1 Chr 22:11). The role and responsibility for the building of the temple that hitherto had belonged to the king is now passed on to the people, and all that is required of them is to respond to the call of Cyrus “and go up” – to go up and build.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Yaira Amit, “On Conclusion, Particularly Reversal Ones,” in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis Presented to Moshe Garsiel*, ed. Shmuel Vargon et al. (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2009), 51 (Hebrew).

⁴⁷ The genealogical list in 1 Chr 3:10–24 demonstrates the genealogy of the kings of the Davidic dynasty up until Josiah, all of which were mentioned with the formula X son of Y son of W etc., compared to the descendants of Josiah who are mentioned through different formulas. See Ehud Ben-Zvi, “Memory and Political Thought in the Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Yehud/Judah: Some Observations,” in *Leadership, Social Memory, and Judean Discourse in the Fifth-Second Centuries BCE*, ed. Ehud Ben-Zvi and Diana Edelman (Hamilton: Equinox, 2016), 22–23. Ben-Zvi thinks that an example of such a leader is found in the figure of Jehoiada the priest, who served as a worthy leader, to the point of a certain resemblance to the kings of Judah, without a royal crown being placed on his head.

⁴⁸ This change is clearly evident in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. See for example: Tamara C. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 185–189. And compare Ehud Ben-Zvi, “When the Foreign Monarch Speaks,” in *The Chronicler as Author*, ed. Michael P. Graham and Steven L. McKenzie, SOTSup 263 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 223.

Summary

What can be learned from the above literary analysis?

1. The Chronicler took complete liberty to design the chapter on destruction and exile according to his own conceptions.
2. The political situation and the relations between the king and the ruling power are among the main issues that occupied the Chronicler toward the end of the kingdom of Judah. We are not told why the first three kings were removed from office, but various allusions to other kings indicate that they sinned. About Zedekiah, on the other hand, it is explicitly related that he rebelled against the king of Babylon. From the time of Josiah, the ruling power becomes a declared tool in the hands of God, and any opposition to it or rebellion against it is like rebellion against God Himself.
3. The rise of the emperors to power greatly undermines the status of the king. His role becomes irrelevant, and he should therefore no longer be regarded as a savior or as a protector of the people and the land as he was in the days of Saul, David, and the rest of the kings of Judah. The sequence of events in the last chapter of the book shows that the king's function was reduced to a single area: obedience to the ruling power. This fact, of course, obviates the true need for a king. An explicit expression of this is contained in the fact that the Chronicler does not even bother referring to Zedekiah's fate while in Jerusalem. This complete disregard indicates that the king has ceased to be the central figure and that his historical role is gradually being taken over by the foreign ruler.
4. Unlike the status of the king, who became irrelevant, the temple and its vessels occupy a place of honor in the eyes of the Chronicler. He presents a graded picture as to the looting of the temple vessels: in the unit on Jehoahaz there is no reference to this at all, in the unit on Jehoiakim only some of the temple vessels are looted, in the unit on Jehoiachin the precious vessels of the temple are looted, and in the unit on Zedekiah all the vessels of the temple are looted. Looting the vessels and bringing

them to Babylon is comparable to the deportation of the people to Babylon, as both events are considered reversible, there still being hope that the vessels and the exiles will eventually return to Jerusalem.

The last chapter in the book should be seen as a 'reversal ending'. The episode in general and its closing scene in particular present an ideology opposite to the one hitherto presented. The hope that a king from the House of David will arise is now replaced by the hope for a leader from the House of David. The leader acts alongside the foreign king and not in his place. He does not go to war and does not protect the people. His aspirations are reduced to the administrative-spiritual realms, as we observe, for example, with regard to Zerubbabel or in a later period with regard to Ezra and Nehemiah.